

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

April 2, 2014

The Honorable John Kerry
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry:

The proposed development of several hardrock mines in British Columbia has raised serious concerns regarding water quality in transboundary rivers that flow from Canada into Southeast Alaska. To ensure the valuable marine resources that contribute so much to the economy and culture of Southeast Alaska are protected, we request that you and other officials from the Department of State raise this issue in appropriate bilateral meetings with your Canadian counterparts.

As a delegation we are strongly supportive of responsible mining activities in Southeast Alaska such as the Greens Creek and Kensington mines. However, reports of proposed mining development in the Stikine, Taku, and Unuk River watersheds have raised concerns among commercial and recreational fishermen, tourism interests, and Alaska Native communities about maintaining the water quality of these transboundary rivers that flow by their homes and onto their fishing grounds.

Alaska has the world's most productive, sustainable commercial fisheries and Southeast Alaska is a major contributor. Southeast fishermen landed a record harvest of 95 million pink salmon in 2013. Combined with other species, the Southeast salmon catch was valued at nearly \$220 million for fishermen. Halibut, black cod, herring, and shellfish are also present in these waters. In total, the Southeast seafood industry produced \$641 million worth of fish in 2011, which created 17,500 jobs and \$468 million in wages.

Tourism brings almost two million visitors a year to Alaska, with about one million coming in via cruise ships through the waters of Southeast. Many are attracted by the recreational fishing opportunities for salmon and halibut. Visitors to Southeast Alaska spent \$1.1 billion in 2013, and created 10,900 jobs that generated \$407 million in income. The entire sector generated \$179 million in state and local revenues.

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The commercial fishing and tourism industries are vital to Alaska's economy and proper steps must be taken on both sides of the border to safeguard them. In addition, Alaska Native communities throughout Southeast are dependent on these same fishery resources, marine mammals and waterfowl to meet their subsistence needs. Tlingit, Haida and Tsimshian traditions and culture are tied to the bounty from the waters of the archipelago. Their food security and very survival depend on keeping these waters healthy.

Water quality is an extremely important issue for Alaskans. Accordingly, we ask you and other officials from the Department of State raise these concerns with the governments of Canada and British Columbia. Doing so will help us gain a better understanding of the new development taking place across our border, ensure that appropriate environmental safeguards are in place for that development, and keep Alaska waters pristine and productive.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. Please contact our offices if you need additional information.

Sincerely,



Lisa Murkowski
United States Senator

Mark Begich
United States Senator

Don Young
Congressman for All Alaska